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# ISTANA

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**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT ONG TENG CHEONG  
AT THE SINGAPORE MALAY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
AND INDUSTRY (SMCCI) 40TH ANNIVERSARY  
AND HARI RAYA DINNER  
AT ORCHARD HOTEL  
ON FRIDAY, 8 MARCH 1996 AT 8.00 PM**

I am pleased to join you this evening for SMCCI's 40th Anniversary and Hari Raya Dinner.

Singapore is at the crossroads of development. The OECD has reclassified Singapore as a "more advanced developing country" just 30 years after our independence. We can well be proud of what we have achieved. At the same time, we must recognise that we will face new challenges ahead.

To help Singapore make the quantum leap into the ranks of developed countries, there are two areas which the Malay community needs to pay special attention to. The first is the importance of continuous training and retraining; the second is the economic opportunities which our region presents.

Over the past decade, the Malay community has made excellent progress. Living standards and educational performance have improved. The proportion of Malay-Muslims with secondary or higher qualifications has increased significantly.

But the world around us is changing rapidly. New products, new processes and new technology are heading towards us at accelerating pace. With this, come new skills and new knowledge. Our existing skills and knowledge quickly become obsolete unless we keep up. There is therefore a need for us to constantly upgrade and stay abreast of new technology to remain relevant.

We have various training schemes to help our workers upgrade and retrain themselves. On-the-job training schemes are also becoming more common.

But in addition to making training opportunities more readily available to workers, we also need to change some of their mindsets. Many workers don't seem to be able to find the time to attend training courses. Others have to work at two jobs to make ends meet. I sympathise with these workers. More needs to be done to help these workers to juggle their time better. They must see time spent on training as short-term pain for long-term gain. The key is how we can better get this message across to them.

The need to train and retrain our workforce is a national problem. It is not a problem that only the Malay community has to grapple with. Singapore can tackle it effectively only if all parties - the Government, employers, workers and community organisations like Mendaki and AMP - share a common goal, and actively work towards this goal. I therefore urge you, as leaders of the Malay community to probe further into this issue and see what more can be done for the community.

Let me now briefly touch on regionalisation. East Asia's economic growth has been spectacular. It is expected to remain one of the fastest growing regions in the world, with Indonesia and Malaysia providing perhaps the best business opportunities for our Malay businessmen because of their sizeable Muslim populations.

The SMCCI can help to facilitate the expansion of your members' businesses into the region. They will have a better chance of succeeding if they can carve out their own niches.

But while we facilitate our businessmen's overseas ventures, it is equally, if not more, important that they take the plunge with their eyes open. For every success story, there are many that failed. Again, the SMCCI can help your members in this area.

As Singapore advances into the 21st century, the challenges facing the Malay community are no different from those facing the other communities. We all need to adapt ourselves to the new global economy and the new information age. I am optimistic that with the strong and committed leadership provided by organisations like the SMCCI, Mendaki and AMP, the Malay community will succeed.

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